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COMMENT ON SOVIET NOTE OF 26 NOVEMBER

In what appears to be an effort to transfer the debate on the agenda for a foreign ministers' conference from a diplomatic exchange, which was described as unrewarding, to a conference table, the Soviet Union has proposed a four power foreign ministers' conference in Berlin at an unspecified time. The Soviet note states that at this meeting the USSR will propose the convening of a five power foreign ministers' conference in the near future for the purpose of reducing international tension.

There is no suggestion in the note that the USSR has changed its basic position relative to the German and Austrian treaties, or even that it is prepared to discuss the substance of these questions now. It would seem that the Kremlin has now agreed to an agenda conference in an effort to offset general Western reaction to the negative Soviet stand of 3 November. The terms of the note suggest that the USSR intends to use this agenda conference for propaganda purposes to debate the questions of international tension, European security and Germany. Furthermore, the unusual promptness of the Soviet reply to the Western note of 16 November seems timed to affect the French parliamentary debate on foreign policy and the forthcoming Bermuda meeting.

Reflecting the defensive tone of recent Soviet propaganda, the Kremlin's familiar attacks on EDC and military bases in Europe are more restrained, and the note does not reiterate that ratification of the Bonn and Paris treaties would preclude the consideration of the German question. Rather than point to its formula for German unity as the only basis for European security, the Soviet Union now alleges willingness to exert all efforts "to cooperate in assuring European security by means of appropriate agreement between all countries of Europe independent of their social structure." This position is in contrast to the last note as well as Soviet propaganda which has ridiculed the idea of any form of security agreement, but it is unlikely that the Soviet Union actually would agree to any of the security arrangements espoused in the West.

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